Frances Hodgson Burnett

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Frances Eliza Hodgson Burnett (24 November 1849 – 29 October 1924) was an English playwright and author. She is best known for her children's stories, in particular *The Secret Garden*, *A Little Princess*, and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

Born Frances Eliza Hodgson, she lived in Cheetham Hill, Manchester. When her father died, the family was forced to sell their home and move to Salford. When she was sixteen, the family emigrated to Knoxville, Tennessee. There she began writing to help earn money for the family, publishing stories in magazines at the age of nineteen. In 1872 she married Swan Burnett. They lived in Paris for two years, where their two sons were born, before returning to the United States to live in Washington D.C. There she began to write novels, the first of which *That Lass o' Lowries*, was published to good reviews. The publication of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1886 made her a popular writer of children's fiction, although her romantic adult novels written in the 1890s were also popular. She wrote and helped to produce stage versions of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Little Princess*.

Burnett enjoyed socializing and lived a lavish lifestyle. Beginning in the 1880s, she began to travel to England frequently and bought a home there in the 1890s. Her oldest son, Lionel, died of tuberculosis in 1892, which caused a relapse of the depression she struggled with for much of her life. She divorced Swan Burnett in 1898 and remarried in 1900, although her second marriage only lasted for a year. At the end of her life she settled in Long Island, where she died in 1924.

Contents

[show]

-

Biography

Childhood in Manchester

Frances Eliza Hodgson was born in Cheetham Hill, Manchester, England to Eliza Boond and Edwin Hodgson. Her mother's family had a long history, and were socially prominent, in the Lancashire area. Her father owned a business in Deansgate, selling brass goods to upper-class homes. The family lived comfortably, employing a maid and a nurse-maid.[1] Frances was the middle of five children, with two older brothers and two younger sisters.[2]

In 1852 the family moved to a more spacious home with greater access to outdoor space.[3] Barely a year later, with his wife pregnant for a fifth time, Hodgson died of a stroke, leaving the family without income. Frances was cared for by her grandmother while her mother took over running the family business. From her grandmother, who bought her books, Frances learned to love reading, in particular her first book *The Flower Book* which had coloured illustrations and poems. Because of their reduced income, Eliza had to give up their house and moved with her children to Seedley Grove, near Pendleton; there they lived with relatives in a home that included a large enclosed garden, in which Frances enjoyed playing.[4] For a year Frances went to a small school run by two women, where she first saw a book about fairies. When her mother moved the family to Salford, Frances mourned the lack of flowers and gardens. Their home was located in Islington Square, adjacent to an area with severe overcrowding and poverty, that "defied description", as described by Friedrich Engels who lived in Manchester at the time.[5]

Frances had an active imagination, writing stories she made up in old notebooks. The children were sent to be educated at The Select Seminary for Young Ladies and Gentleman, where she was described as "precocious" and "romantic".[6] She had an active social life and enjoyed telling stories to her friends and cousins; in her mother she found a good audience, although her brothers had a tendency to tease her about her stories.[7]

Manchester was almost entirely dependent on a cotton economy which was ruined by the American Civil War.[8] In 1863 Eliza Hodgson was forced to sell their business and move the family again to a smaller home; at that time Frances' limited education came to an end. Eliza's brother asked the family to join him in America in Knoxville where he had a thriving dry goods store. Within the year Eliza decided to move the family from Manchester,[9] sold their possessions, and told Frances to burn her early writings in the fire.[8]

Move to Tennessee

After the end of the war and the trade it brought to the area, Eliza's brother lost much of his business and was unable to provide for the newly arrived family.[10] The family went to live in a log cabin during their first winter in New Market, outside of Knoxville, later moving to a home Frances called "Noah's Ark, Mt. Arafat".[11][2] Living across from them was the Burnett family, and Frances became friendly with Swan Burnett whom she introduced to books and authors such as Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and William Makepeace Thackeray she had read in England. She may have befriended him because of a childhood injury that left him lame and unable to participate in physical activities. Not long after they met, he left for Ohio to college.[12]

Frances turned to writing to earn money, with her first story published in *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1868. Soon after, she was being published regularly in *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Scribner's Monthly*, *Peterson's Ladies' Magazine* and *Harper's Bazaar*.[2] She wanted to escape from the family's poverty, and tended to overwork herself, later calling herself "a pen driving machine" during her early years of writing. For five years she wrote constantly, often not worrying about the quality of her work.[13] Once her first story was published, before she was 18, she spent the rest of her life as a working writer.[14] By 1869 she had earned enough to move the family into a better home in Knoxville.[15]

Her mother died in 1870, and within two years two of her sisters and a brother were married. Although she remained friends with Swan, neither was in a hurry to be married.[16]

Marriage

Burnett as a young woman

With the income from her writing she returned to England for an extended visit in 1872,[2] and then went to Paris where she had a couture dress made to be shipped to Tennessee, having agreed to marry Swan. She returned home before the dress arrived and attempted to postpone the wedding, but Swan insisted they marry as soon as possible. The two were married in September, 1873. Writing about the dress disappointment to a Manchester friend, she said of her new husband: "Men are so shallow ... he does not know the vital importance of the difference between white satin and tulle, and cream coloured brocade".[17] Within the year she gave birth to her first child, Lionel, in September 1874. Also during that year she began work on her first full length novel, *That Lass o' Lowries*, set in Lancashire.

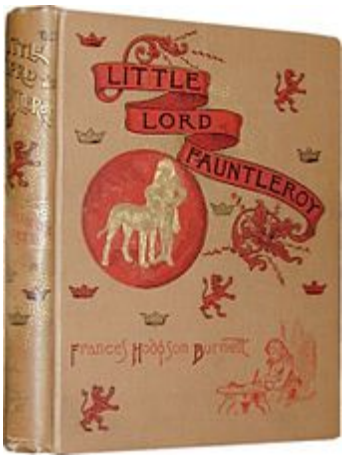
The couple wanted to leave Knoxville, and her writing income was enough for them to travel to Paris where Swan continued his medical training as an eye and ear specialist. The birth of their second child Vivian forced them to return to the United States.[11] She had wanted her second child to be a girl, and having chosen the name Vivien, changed to the masculine spelling for her new son. The family continued to rely on her writing income and to economize she made clothing for her boys, often including many frills.[18] Later, Burnett continued to make clothing, designing velvet suits with lace collars for her boys, and frilly dresses for herself. She allowed her sons' hair to grow long, which she then shaped into long curls.[18]

Washington D.C.

After two years in Paris, the family intended to move to Washington D.C. where Swan wanted to start his medical practice.[2] However they were in debt, so Frances was forced to live with Swan's parents in New Market while he established himself in Washington D.C. Early in 1877 she was offered a contract to have *That Lass o' Lowries* publlshed, which was doing well in its serialization, and at that point she made her husband her business manager.[19] *That Lass o' Lowries* was published to good reviews, and the rights were sold for a British edition. Shortly after the publication of the book, she joined her husband in Washington, D.C., where she established a household and friends.[20] She continued to write, becoming known as a rising young novelist. Despite the difficulties of raising a family and settling in to a new city, Burnett began work on *Haworth's* which was published in 1879, as well as writing a dramatic interpretation of *That Lass o' Lowrie* in response to a pirated stage version presented in London. After a visit to Boston in 1879 where she met Louisa May Alcott, and Mary Mapes Dodge, editor of children's magazine *St. Nicholas*, Burnett began to write children's fiction. For the next five years she had published several short works in *St. Nicholas*. Burnett continued to write adult fiction as well: *Louisiana* was published in 1880; *A Fair Barbarian* in 1881; and *Through One Administration* in 1883.[2] However, as had happened earlier in Knoxville, she felt the pressure of maintaining a household, caring for children and a husband, and keeping to her writing schedule, which caused exhaustion and depression.[20]

Within a few years Burnett became well-known in Washington society and hosted a literary salon on Tuesday evenings, often attended by politicians, as well as local literati.[21] Swan's practice grew and had a

good reputation, but his income lagged behind hers, forcing her to believe she had to continue writing.[11] Unfortunately she was often ill and suffered from the heat of Washington D.C., which she escaped whenever possible. In the early 1880s she became interested in Christian Science as well as Spiritualism and Theosophy. These beliefs would have an effect on her later life as well as being incorporated into her later fiction.[2] She was a devoted mother and took great joy in her two sons. She doted on their appearance, continuing the practice of curling their long hair each day, which became the inspiration for *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.[11]



Little Lord Fauntleroy was published in 1886.

In 1884 she began work on *Little Lord Fauntleroy* with the serialization beginning in 1885 in *St. Nicholas*, and the publication in book form in 1886. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* received good reviews, became a best-seller in the United States and England, was translated into 12 languages, and secured Burnett's reputation as a writer.[2] The story features a boy who dresses in elaborate velvet suits and wears his long hair in curls.[21] The central character, Cedric, was modeled on Burnett's younger son Vivian, and the autobiographical aspects of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* occasionally led to disparaging remarks from the press. After the publication of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Burnett's reputation as a writer of children's books was fully established. In 1888 she won a lawsuit in England over the dramatic rights to *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, establishing a precedent that was incorporated into British copyright law in 1911. In response to a second incident of pirating her material into a dramatic piece, she wrote *The Real Little Lord Fountleroy* which was produced on stage in London and on Broadway.[2] The play went on to make her as much money as the book.[21]

Return to England

In 1887 Burnett traveled to England for Queen Victoria's Jubilee, which became the first of yearly transatlantic trips from the United States to England.[2] Accompanied by her sons, she visited tourist attractions such as Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in London. In her rented rooms she continued the Tuesday evening salon and soon attracted visitors, meeting Stephen Townsend for the first time. However, she felt ill from the heat and the crowds of tourists, spending protracted periods in bed.[22] They moved on to spend the winter in Florence where Burnett wrote *The Fortunes of Philippa Fairfax*, her only book to be published in England but not in the United States.[22] That winter *Sara Crewe or What Happened at Miss Minchin's* was published in the United States.[23] She would go on to alter *Sara Crewe* into a stage play, and later rewrite the story into *A Little Princess*.[2] In 1888 Burnett returned to Manchester where she leased a large home off Cromwell Road, had it decorated, and then turned it over to cousins to run as a boarding house. She then moved to London where she took rooms, enjoyed the London season, and prepared *Phyllis*, a stage adaptation of *The Fortunes of Philippa Fairfax* for production. When the play ran she was disappointed by the bad reviews, and turned to socializing . During this period she began to see more of Stephen Townsend, whom she had met during the Jubilee year.[24]

In 1890 Burnett's oldest son Lionel died from consumption in Paris, a tragedy that greatly shaped her life and her writing.[2] In vain she sought a cure from physicians and took her son to visit spas in Germany.[25]

After his death, in a letter to a friend, she admitted her accomplishments were nothing in comparison to being the mother of two boys, one of whom died, as she sank into a deep depression.[26] At this time she turned away from her traditional upbringing in the Church of England and embraced Spiritualism and Christian Science.[11] She returned to London where she sought the distraction of charity work and formed the Drury Lane Boys' Club, hosting an opening in February 1892. Also during this period she wrote a play with a starring role for Stephen Townsend to start his acting career.[27] After a two year absence from her Washington, D.C. home, her husband, and her younger son, Burnett returned in March 1892, where she continued to charity work and began writing again.[28] In 1893 Burnett published an autobiography titled *The One I Knew Best of All*.[2] Also in that year, she had a set of her books displayed at the Chicago World Fair.[29]

Divorce and move to Great Maytham Hall

Great Maytham Hall Garden, Kent, England, provided the inspiration for *The Secret Garden*.

Burnett returned to London in 1894 only to receive news that her younger son Vivian was ill, so she quickly returned. Unlike his brother, Vivian recovered, but missed his first term at university. Burnett stayed with him until he was well, then returned to London. At this time she began to worry about her finances: she was paying for Vivian's education; keeping a house in Washington D.C. (Swan had moved out of the house to his own apartment); and keeping a home in London. Typical of her pattern, she turned to writing as a source of income, and began to write *A Lady of Quality*.[30] *A Lady of Quality* was to become the first of a series of successful adult historical novels. In 1896 *A Lady of Quality* was published; in 1899 she followed up with *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim*; and in 1901 she had published *The Making of a Marchioness* and *The Methods of Lady Walderhurst*.[2]

In 1898, when Vivian finished Harvard, she divorced Swan Burnett.[2] Officially the cause for the divorce was given to be desertion, but actually Burnett and Swan had orchestrated the dissolution of their marriage some years earlier. When Swan took his own apartment and ceased to live with Burnett, after a period of two years she could divorce him for desertion. However, the press called her a New Woman, with the *Washington Post* writing the divorce resulted from Burnett's "advanced ideas regarding the duties of a wife and the rights of women".[31]

From the mid-1890s she lived in England at Great Maytham Hall, which had a large garden where she indulged her love for flowers and for the next decade became her home in England, though she continued her annual transatlantic trips to the United States.[2] In addition to the gardens it offered, Maytham Hall resembled a feudal manor house which enchanted Burnett.[11] She socialized in the local villages, and enjoyed the country life. She filled the house with guests, and had Stephen Townsend living with her. The local vicar was scandalized at her lifestyle.[32] In February 1900 she married Stephen Townsend.[33]

Remarriage and later life

The marriage took place in Genoa, Italy, and the honeymoon was in Pegli, during two weeks of rain. Her biographer, Gretchen Gerzina writes "it was the biggest mistake of her life". The press stressed the age difference—he was ten years younger than she—and they called him her secretary.[33] Biographer Ann Thwaite doubts he loved her. She claims the 50-year-old Burnett was "stout, rouged and unhealthy".

However, Thwaite believes he needed her. She helped with his acting career and she supported him financially. Within months, in a letter to her sister, she admitted the marriage was in trouble. She described Townsend as scarcely sane and hysterical. Thwaite argues Townsend blackmailed her into the marriage: he needed her money, but he wanted the rights of a husband.[34]

Frances Hodgson Burnett in 1901

Unable to face the thought of living with her new husband at Maytham, Burnett rented a house in London for the winter of 1900-1901. There she socialized with friends and continued to write. She worked on two books simultaneously: *The Shuttle*, a longer and more complicated book; and *The Making of a Marchioness*, which she wrote in a few weeks and published to good reviews. In the spring of 1901, Townsend replaced her long-time publisher Scribner's with a publishing house offering a larger advance. Despite a visit to Burnett in Maytham during the summer Scribner did not secure her newest manuscript, *The Shuttle*.[35] In 1902 Burnett ceased living with Townsend.[2] After a summer of socializing and filling Maytham with house-guests, Burnett suffered a physical collapse sometime in the autumn. She returned to America, and in the winter of 1902 entered a sanatorium. There she told Townsend she would no longer live with him, and the brief marriage ended.[36]

She returned to Maytham two years later in June 1904.[37] Maytham Hall had a series of walled gardens and in the rose garden she wrote several books. There began the idea for *The Secret Garden*. In 1905 *A Little Princess* was published, after she reworked the original screen play into a novel.[2] As she had done earlier in life, Burnett used her writing to increase her income. She lived an extravagant lifestyle, buying expensive clothing, which she never gave up.[11] She returned permanently to the United States in 1907, having become a citizen in 1905, and in the Plandome Park section of Plandome Manor, Long Island she built a home, completed in 1908. Her son Vivian was in involved in the publishing business and at his request she agreed to be editor for *Children's Magazine*. Over the next several years she had published in *Children's Magazine* a number of shorter works. In 1911 she had *The Secret Garden* published.[2] In her later years she maintained the summer home on Long Island, and a winter home in Bermuda.[11] *The Lost Prince* was published in 1915, and *The Head of the House of Coombe* was published in 1922.[2]

Burnett lived for the last 17 years of her life in Plandome Manor, New York,[38] where she died on 29 October 1924.[2] She is buried in Roslyn Cemetery nearby, next to her son Vivian.

Reception

Polly Hovarth writes that *Little Lord Fauntleroy* "was the Harry Potter of his time and Frances Hodgson Burnett was as celebrated for creating him as J.K. Rowling is for Potter." During the serialization in *St. Nicholas* magazine, readers looked forward to new installments. The fashions in the book became popular

with velvet Lord Fauntleroy suits being sold, as well as other Fauntleroy merchandise such as velvet collars, playing cards, and chocolates.[21] During a period when sentimental fiction was the norm, and in the United States the "rags to riches" story popular, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was a hit; although over the years *The Secret Garden* has retained the popularity *Little Lord Fauntleroy* has lost.[39]

Selected works

A NEW STORY BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

THE PRETTY SISTER OF JOSÉ.

MRS. BURNETT'S PUBLISHED WORKS.

HER POPULAR NOVELS.

That Lass o' Lowrie's, $1 25

A Fair Barbarian, $1 25

Through One Administration, $1 50

Louisiana, $1 25

Haworth's, $1 50

Surly Tim, and other Stories, $1 00

A UNIFORM LIBRARY EDITION.

HER FAMOUS JUVENILES.

Little Lord Fauntleroy. Illustrated by R. B. Birch. $1.00.

Sara Crewe. Illustrated by R. B. Birch. $1.00.

EARLIER STORIES IN PAPER.

Lindsay's Luck, 50 cents.

Pretty Polly Pemberton, 40 "

Kathleen, 50 "

Theo, 50 "

Miss Crespigny, 50 "

That Lass o' Lowrie's, 50 cents.

A Fair Barbarian, 40 "

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, 743-745 Broadway, New York.

Advertisement of Burnett's works

- *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877)
- *Lindsay's Luck* (1878)
- *Haworth's* (1879)
- *Louisiana* (1880)
- *A Fair Barbarian* (1881)
- *Through One Administration* (1883)
- *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886)
- *Sara Crewe or What Happened at Miss Minchin's* (1888)
- *The Fortunes of Philippa Fairfax* (1888)
- *The Pretty Sister of San Jose* (1889)
- *The Drury Lane Boys' Club* (1892)
- *The One I Knew the Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child* (1893)
- *A Lady of Quality* (1896)
- *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim* (1899)
- *The Making of a Marchioness* (1901), reprinted by Persephone Books (2001)
- *A Little Princess*:*Being the Whole Story of Sara Crewe Now Told for the First Time* (1905)
- *Queen Silver-Bell* (1906)
- *The Shuttle* (1907) reprinted by Persephone Books in 2007
- *The Secret Garden* (1911)
- *The Lost Prince* (1915)
- *The Little Hunchback Zia* (1916)
- *The Head of the House of Coombe* (1922)

References

1. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 12–13
2. ^ *a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u* Rutherford

3. ^ Thwaite 1991, p. 4
4. ^ Thwaite 1991, p. 8
5. ^ Thwaite 1991, p. 12
6. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 17–18
7. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 20
8. ^ *a* *b* Gerzina 2004, p. 3
9. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 24
10. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 6
11. ^ *a* *b* *c* *d* *e* *f* *g* *h* Hofstader 1971
12. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 27–28
13. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 30–31
14. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 35
15. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 25
16. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 39–41
17. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 53
18. ^ *a* *b* Hovarth 2004, p. xii
19. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 62–64
20. ^ *a* *b* Gerzina 2004, pp. 67–69
21. ^ *a* *b* *c* *d* Hovarth 2004, p. xi
22. ^ *a* *b* Thwaite 1991, pp. 101–104
23. ^ Thwaite 1991, p. 105
24. ^ Thwaite 1991, pp. 122–123
25. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 138
26. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 142
27. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 151–152
28. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 158–160
29. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 166
30. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 171–176
31. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 202
32. ^ Gerzina 2004, pp. 205–207
33. ^ *a* *b* Gerzina 2004, pp. 214–215
34. ^ Thwaite 1991, pp. 190–191
35. ^ Thwaite 1991, pp. 196–199
36. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 229
37. ^ Gerzina 2004, p. 231
38. ^ O'Connell, Pamela Licalzi. "LITERATURE; 'The Secret Garden' Has Deep Island Roots", *The New York Times*, August 8, 2004. Accessed November 11, 2007. "Mrs. Burnett, the author of *The Secret Garden* and other enduring children's classics, lived on a grand estate in Plandome the last 17 years of her life."
39. ^ Hovarth 2004, p. xiv

Sources

- Burnett, Frances Hodgson (2000), "Introduction", *The Secret Garden*, Oxford University Press, ISBN 0192835963, http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=T3JxuhuhlUwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=frances+hodgson+burnett&ots=Ddc8-ooSR6&sig=8QCSm9NTUKtjBU5Xk6fh1ULmTc0#v=onepage&q&f=false
- Hofstader, Beatrice (1971), "Burnett, Frances Hodgson", *Notable American Women: 1607-1950*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Horvath, Polly (2004), "Foreword", *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, Simon and Shuster, ISBN 9780689869945, http://books.google.com/books?id=tSRSHkaWpiAC&source=gbs_navlinks_s
- Thwaite, Ann (1991), *Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1849-1924*, David R. Godine, ISBN 9780879237905,

http://books.google.com/books?id=rRtis6DUY4wC&dq=frances+hodgson+burnett&lr=&source=gbs_navlinks_s
- Gerzina, Gretchen (2004), *Frances Hodgson Burnett: the unexpected life of the author of The secret garden*, Rutgers University Press, ISBN 0-8135-3382-1, http://books.google.com/books?id=OTuhrlU0aKMC&dq=frances+hodgson+burnett&lr=&source=gbs_navlinks_s
- Rutherford, L.M. (1994), "British Children's Writers 1880-1914", in Laura M. Zaldman, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, **141**, Detroit: Gale Research Literature Resource Center

External links

Wikisource has original text related to this article:
Author:Frances Hodgson Burnett

- Works by Frances Hodgson Burnett at Project Gutenberg